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AUTHOR Ortiz, Alba A.
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ABSTRACT

Lack of educational progress of Hispanics and other language minority students has very important implications for special education as these students are very likely to be referred for special services. Language minority students are overrepresented in programs for the learning disabled, and, with the exception of Asian students, are underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented. With projections that one of every three Americans in this country will be a minority by the year 2,000, greater attention must be given to assuring that multicultural populations succeed in mainstream education and that procedures used to assess functioning levels and to recommend services reflect that those involved in the decision-making process understand how language and culture influence performance. Prereferral intervention attempts to deal with learning and behavior problems that might otherwise be inaccurately identified as disabilities. The anticipated outcomes of the implementation of prereferral strategies include: a reduction in the number of students perceived to be "at risk" by regular classroom teachers because of teacher's increased abilities to handle naturally occurring diversity of skills and characteristics of students in their classes; reduction of the number of students referred to special education; reduction of the number of students inappropriately labeled as handicapped; and improved student outcomes. Responses to the paper by Ann C. Willig and Sherry R. Migdal are appended. (VWL)

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Assessing Appropriate and Inappropriate Referral Systems for LEP Special Education Students

Alba A. Ortiz
University of Texas, Austin

ED 343 819

By the year 2,000, the United States will have 260,000,000 people, one of every three of whom will be African American, Hispanic, or Asian American. Minority students will comprise the majority of public school students, especially in large city schools. Students from minority groups already account for more than 50 percent of K-12 school enrollments in seven states (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] of 1990).

These demographic changes have focused attention on the educational status of multicultural populations. Unfortunately, the overwhelming evidence is that minority students experience limited academic success. For example, Gottfredson (1988) found that urban systems retain 15-20 percent of at-risk students at each grade level and that by the 10th grade, 60 percent of these students have been retained at least once. Retention is a common response to academic failure, even though there is little data to suggest that it leads to improved performance. On the contrary, data suggest that retention significantly increases the probability that students will dropout before graduation (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990). The dropout rates for minorities is 68 percent higher than for Anglo students (IDEA, 1990). A recent report of the National Commission on Secondary Schooling for Hispanics (1984) indicated that 45 percent of Mexican American and Puerto Rican students who enter school never finish and that of *all* Hispanics, 40 percent who leave school do so before tenth grade. Of Hispanics who took the "High School and Beyond" achievement tests, 76 percent scored in the bottom half of the national norms; it is not surprising, then, that 40 percent of the Hispanic student population is in a general education, versus an academic track.

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Lack of educational progress of Hispanics and other language minority students has very important implications for special education as these students are likely to be referred for special services. More minorities continue to be served in special education than would be expected from their percentage of the general school population. Language minorities are overrepresented in programs for the learning disabled and, with the exception of Asian students, underrepresented in programs for the gifted and talented. With projections that one of every three Americans in this country will be black, brown, or Asian by the year 2,000, greater attention must be given to assuring that

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multicultural populations succeed in mainstream education and that procedures used to assess functioning levels and to recommend services reflect that those involved in the decision-making process understand how language and culture influence performance.

Otherwise, the increasing diversity of students in today's schools will overwhelm special education programs (Phillips and McCullough, 1990).

Issues Associated with Referral of Students to Special Education

Algozzine, Christenson and Ysseldyke (1982) conducted a national survey of directors of special education and asked them how many students had been referred between 1977 and 1980. The authors found that from 3 to 6 percent of the school-age population was referred each year for assessment. Of those referred, 92 percent were tested and 73 percent were found to be eligible for special education services. Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Graden, Wesson, Algozzine, and Deno (1983) conclude:

> It is clear that the most important decision made in the entire assessment process is the decision by a regular classroom teacher to refer a student for assessment. Once a student is referred, there is a high probability that the student will be assessed and placed in special education (p. 80).

While some would argue that there is no harm in placing students in special education who are already failing in the regular classroom, Wilkinson and Ortiz (1986) found that, after three years of special education placement, Hispanic students who were classified as learning disabled had actually lost ground. Their verbal and performance IQ scores were lower than they had been at initial entry into special education and their achievement scores were at essentially the same level as at entry. Neither regular education nor special education programs adequately served the academic needs of these language minority students.

An issue more basic than whether students profit from special education placement is whether they are eligible for such services in the first place. Algozzine and Ysseldyke (1981) found that 51 percent of placement team decision makers declared *normal* students eligible for special education services. Shepard (1987) and her colleagues (Shephard, Smith, & Vojir, 1983) estimate that half of the learning disabled population can be more accurately described as slow learners, second language acquirers, naughty children, students who are absent and move from school to school or average children in above average school districts. Shepard and Smith (1981) contend that half

of the students placed under the label of perceptual and communication disorders (PCD) are misplaced:

> ...half of the children currently placed as PCD do not qualify by any definition of handicap. The most serious issue to be considered in response to this finding is that many of the "non-handicapped" children have serious problems in school and need special help. This is especially true for pupils in the language interference group....They may lag seriously behind in school because their first language is not English or because they may have trouble adapting to the mores of the school....They are not handicapped, yet they need extra attention, and there is currently no way to provide it other than labeling the child PCD (p. 170)

These data suggest that children with no readily identifiable handicapping condition are being considered for special education placement in increasing numbers. In fact, research shows that teacher referrals are often based on such extraneous factors as race, sex, physical appearance, and socioeconomic status as opposed to the pupil's need for special services (Bennet & Ragosta, 1984). In the case of limited English proficient (LEP) students in programs for the learning disabled (Cummins, 1984; Ortiz et al., 1985) and the speech and language handicapped (Ortiz, García, Wheeler, & Maldonado-Colón, 1986), neither the data gathered as part of the referral and evaluation process, nor the decisions made using these data, reflect that professionals adequately understand limited English proficiency, second language acquisition, cultural, and other differences which mediate students' learning.

In addition to evidence that the background characteristics of students influence referral, there is a growing body of literature indicating that many students served in special education experience difficulties which are "pedagogically induced" (Cummins, 1984). According to Hargis (cited in Gickling & Thompson, 1985):

> These children, who are in fact the curriculum casualties or curriculum handicapped, would not have acquired their various labels had the curriculum been adjusted to fit their individual needs, rather than having tried to force the children to achieve in the artificial but clerically simpler sequence of grades, calendar and materials that comprise the curricula. (p. 209)

Although there is often a requirement that the individual initiating the referral document interventions tried to improve academic performance prior to referral to special education, this is frequently not done (Gartner, 1986). Gartner concludes that we have the worst of alternatives in place: (a) a process that makes it easy to refer a student, with no check as to whether the referral may be a matter of

prejudice against the child or failure on the school's part to meet the child's need, and (b) a system which not only does not demand but, in fact, provides little incentive for "prevention." He laments this situation because of his strong belief that most special education students could be better served in a general education system that gives greater attention to individual needs, adapts learning environments to accommodate diversity, provides training and support to increase the ability of school staff to respond to student diversity, and which funds efforts aimed at prevention rather than allocating resources to costly remedial programs.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss both referral and prereferral processes and to suggest how these might be made more effective. By design, more attention is given to prereferral intervention because available literature on the topic of special education referral consistently recommends that the best way to improve referral practices is to begin by implementing effective prereferral strategies. When regular educators, including bilingual education and English as a second language programs and personnel, respond to the unique needs of students, fewer of these students will need to be referred to special education. Those that are likely to be eligible for services because prereferral interventions will have exhausted all possibility that they can be maintained in the mainstream without specialized assistance.

Prereferral Intervention: Prevention

Prereferral intervention attempts to deal with learning and behavior problems that might otherwise be inaccurately identified as disabilities, at the site of their emergence -- the regular education classroom (Pugach & Johnson, 1988). In practice, prereferral intervention generally refers to a teacher's modification of instruction or classroom management, before referral, to better accommodate difficult-to-teach students who are not disabled (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstrom, & Stecker, 1990). With increasing frequency, prereferral processes are also designed to minimize inappropriate referrals by strengthening the teacher's capacity to intervene with a greater diversity of student background characteristics, skills, abilities, and interests.

This traditional definition of prereferral intervention may be too narrow to adequately address the widespread failure of minority students in today's schools. The search for the cause of school-related difficulties should begin with an examination of whether students have been provided a school and classroom context conducive to success -- a context which reflects understanding and acceptance of linguistic and cultural diversity and other student characteristics and a

curriculum appropriate to the needs of the learner, teachers, and other service providers who have direct training and experience in teaching multicultural populations. This suggests that prereferral intervention should be conceptualized as having two major components: (a) a prevention component aimed at establishing educational environments conducive to the academic success of language minority students so that problems will not occur in the first place, and (b) a problem-solving component in which the teacher first adapts instruction and/or the classroom environment to improve student performance and then requests assistance from others if problem-solving efforts are not successful.

A Framework for Empowering Minority Students. Prevention begins with establishing an educational environment that fosters success rather than breeds failure among minority students. Cummins (1986) argues that educational reforms which have attempted to reverse the pattern of underachievement and failure among minority students in the United States have been largely unsuccessful because they have not altered the historical relationships that have existed between teachers and students, and between schools and communities. To reverse the trend of widespread failure, educators, especially teachers, must redefine their roles within the classroom, the community, and the broader society so that these role definitions result in interactions that empower, rather than disable, students. Such redefinition is an important aspect of the first component of prereferral intervention -- preventing problems from occurring in the first place.

Cummins describes educators' role definitions along a continuum with one end promoting the empowerment of students and the other contributing to the disabling of students. Disabled students are considered as inherently inferior and are characterized by low achievement, high drop out rates, and high rates of referral to special education. In contrast, students who are empowered by their school experiences develop the ability to succeed. Cummins' framework for empowerment of minority students is summarized briefly below.

Collaborative school-community relationships. Schools are influenced greatly in their relationship with minority communities by the power and status relationships between minority and majority groups in the larger societal context (Fishman, 1976; Ogbu, 1978; Paulston, 1980). When societal conditions do not permit positive orientations between home and school, minority students come to school already predisposed to failure, a situation exacerbated by parents' limited access to economic and educational resources, bicultural ambivalence, and interactional styles that may not facilitate successful teacher-student interactions in the classroom (Heath, 1983; Wong-Fillmore, 1983).

Failure can be prevented if minority groups are positively oriented toward both their own and the mainstream culture, and if they do not perceive themselves to be inferior to the dominant group. Teachers with an exclusionary orientation tend to view parental involvement as either irrelevant or detrimental to children's progress. On the other hand, teachers who want to empower students, attempt to actively involve parents and other community members in the schooling process. Collaborative approaches between school and home allow parents to develop a sense of their own effectiveness in relation to their children's education, which, in turn, results in students' increased interest in school learning as well as improvement in behavior. To achieve an inclusive orientation, teachers must actively encourage parent involvement in their child's education both at home and at school. Moreover, if they are not bilingual, they must be willing to work closely with other teachers and aides who speak the child's primary language or dialect in order to communicate effectively.

Cultural and linguistic incorporation. Historically, "compensatory" education programs have been used by educators to equip minority students with academic and language skills required for success in mainstream society. However, by their very nature and orientation, compensatory programs are designed to *replace* minority students' primary language and culture with those skills deemed more critical to later social, economic, and academic success (e.g., the acquisition of English proficiency and knowledge of the dominant culture). When instruction is at the cost of the student's own culture and language, it is subtractive and defeats the very goals it seeks to accomplish.

In contrast to the subtractive orientation, additive approaches incorporate CLD students' culture and language in the teaching-learning process, communicate value and respect for the students' own diverse backgrounds, and reinforce their cultural identity, while at the same time teaching critical language, academic, and social skills. In schools that empower minority students, educators and the materials they use go beyond attempts to incorporate traditional aspects of the student's culture (e.g., food, music, festivals, and clothing) into the curriculum, since these aspects frequently fail to acknowledge the contemporary social, political, and economic experiences of minority groups. Moreover, such attempts are often characterized by fragmentation and isolation and may communicate stereotypes of racial and ethnic groups.

The curricula and instructional materials should be reviewed to determine whether they present both minority and majority perspectives and contributions and to determine whether they are relevant to students' language and culture. If student failure can be attributed to the use of inappropriate curricula or to ineffective instructional materials, then referrals to special education are unwarranted.

Efforts, instead, should focus on modifying or creating more effective instructional programs.

Instruction should be consistent with what is known about language acquisition and about the interrelationship between the first and the second language development (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988). Teachers should mediate instruction, using both the first and the second language, and integrate English development with subject matter instruction. Along with this, they should also respond to, and use, cultural referents during instruction, respecting the values and norms of the home culture even as the norms of the majority culture are being taught (Tikunoff, 1985).

The research literature (Cummins, 1984; Krashen, 1982) indicates that the native language provides the foundation for acquiring English as a second language skill. Therefore, educational programs which empower students have strong special language programs which promote native language conceptual skills as a basis for English communicative competence and literacy development, Cummins, 1984). Conversely, programs which prematurely shift students into English-only instruction interrupt a natural developmental sequence and interfere with intellectual and cognitive development. It is this interference that leads to academic failure and eventual referral to special education.

Interactive pedagogical approaches. Cummins believes that most curriculum planning in North America is characterized by a "transmission" model of instruction. Transmission-oriented teaching emphasizes sequential learning objectives, based on analysis of academic task demands, and directs instruction on these individual task components. Cummins argues that structuring learning into small, sequential steps tends to strip activities of the context required for that learning, thereby removing all cues that the child would need in the active generation of meaning. By structuring and grading learning experiences, the teacher becomes the initiator and controller of interactions with students, further stripping the learning situation of student control and intrinsic motivation. Teacher control assigns a passive role to the child, which further inhibits the intrinsic motivation and active involvement in learning that are essential for the development of higher order cognitive and academic skills. Thus, these models serve to maintain students' low functioning.

Cummins proposes, instead, that interactive approaches be used for instruction of language minorities. These approaches incorporate the basic tenets of language and literacy acquisition reflected in current research in these areas: (a) genuine dialogue between teacher and student in both oral and written modalities; (b) guidance and facilitation rather than control of student learning by the teacher; (c) encouragement of student-student talk in a collaborative learning

context; (d) encouragement of meaningful language use rather than correctness of surface forms; (e) conscious integration of language use and development into all curricular content; (f) a focus on developing higher-level cognitive skills rather than basic skills; and (g) task presentations that foster intrinsic, rather than extrinsic, motivation.

Instruction should be consistent with what is known about language acquisition and about the interrelationship between the first and the second language development. The research literature (Cummins, 1984; Krashen, 1982) indicates that the native language provides the foundation for acquiring English as a second language skill. Therefore, strong promotion of native language conceptual skills will be more effective in providing a basis for English literacy (Cummins, 1984). Conversely, a premature shift to English-only instruction interrupts a natural developmental sequence and interferes with intellectual and cognitive development. Teachers should mediate instruction, using both the first and the second language, and integrate English development with subject matter instruction. Along with this, teachers should also respond to, and use, cultural referents during instruction, respecting the values and norms of the home culture even as the norms of the majority culture are being taught (Tikunoff, 1985). Above all, teachers must communicate high expectations for students and a sense of efficacy in terms of their own ability to teach culturally and linguistically diverse students.

Advocacy-oriented assessment. As indicated previously, a review of the referral-assessment-placement literature has also suggested that once a student in referred for special education, there is a high probability (75-90 percent) that he or she will be identified as handicapped (Reynolds, 1984). The assessment process has traditionally served to legitimate the disabling of minority students (Cummins, 1986). Because medical models are predisposed to locating psychological dysfunction within the student, ecological models of assessment are needed whereby the learning problem is examined in light of all contextual variables affecting the teaching-learning process, including teachers, students, curriculum, instructional approaches, and so forth. In the Cummins framework, an advocacy-oriented or "delegitimization" role for assessment personnel would involve "locating the pathology within the societal power relations between dominant and dominated groups, in the reflection of these power relations between school and communities, and in the mental and cultural disabling of minority students that takes place in classrooms" (Cummins, 1986, p.30).

Cummins' notion of advocacy-oriented assessment is compatible with the concept of prereferral intervention. In systems that empower students, teachers have the knowledge and skills to provide instruction consistent with students' needs. Moreover, they are

adept at analyzing student performance, identifying gaps in skills and knowledge, and developing instruction to remediate those gaps within the framework of reciprocal interaction teaching. The importance of clinical teaching is discussed in a later section as it is an important component of prereferral intervention for students experiencing academic and behavioral problems in the regular education classroom.

Stedman's Formula for Effective Schools for Minority Students

Stedman argues that recent educational reforms which are based on the traditional effective schools' formula have resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum in a quest for higher test scores, neglect of higher-order thinking skills and liberal arts subjects, and increased teacher burnout. He cautions that implementation of the effective schools formula in low-income, urban schools may lead to a widening gap between the academic achievement of minority students and that of their Anglo peers. Moreover, Stedman questions how traditional approaches to schooling, which have proven unsuccessful in the past, can now be expected to produce academic success for all students.

The effective schools' literature delineates a set of factors believed to correlate positively with student gains in achievement. These factors include strong leadership by the principal, high expectations for student achievement, emphasis on basic skills, an orderly environment, systematic evaluation of students, and increased time on task (Stedman, 1987). Stedman analyzed case studies of schools which achieved grade-level success with low-income students and which maintained this success over several years. Based on this analysis, he offers a new synthesis of the effective schools' literature and a more practical approach to school improvement. Stedman's formula parallels very closely those factors included by Cummins (1986) and provides a data base to support this theoretical framework for empowering minority students. The alternative formula includes nine broad-based categories of highly interrelated practices.

Like Cummins, Stedman suggests that effective schools value *cultural pluralism* and acknowledge the ethnic and racial identity of their students and reinforce this identity by providing role models, offering bilingual education, and orienting students and their families to the school context. Effective schools provide mechanisms for administrator-parent-teacher-student *collaboration in governance*, rather than relying solely on the principal for instructional leadership. School personnel communicate frequently with parents (for example, through newsletters and home visits), encourage *parental involvement* in their children's learning, and provide opportunities

for parents to participate in school governance. Lower teacher-pupil ratios are achieved in large part because positive school-community relations increase the number of volunteers and community resources available to students and provide more opportunities for adult-student interaction. In this way, *extra attention* can be given to students experiencing academic difficulty.

Students are actively engaged in their own learning through *academically rich programs* and tasks that capitalize on their personal experiences. Teaching is neither narrow, standardized, nor drill-based; basic skills are attained without sacrificing higher-order cognitive skills or a liberal arts education. Students are given responsibilities for student affairs and are involved in school governance. Good discipline is the result of the schools' organization and of their *positive, culturally-inviting learning environments.* Effective schools are "happy places," provide encouragement to students, and are not accepting of teacher unkindness.

In effective schools, the *best teachers are assigned those positions considered to be the most important*, including teaching in the early primary grades and remedial programs and serving as curriculum specialists or trouble-shooters. *In-service training is tailored to fit the specific needs of teachers and provides opportunities for them to share practical teaching techniques.* This fosters a collaborative learning community on the school campus.

Finally, *effective schools design their programs to ensure academic success and to head off academic problems.* For example, effective schools assign their best teachers to the early grades, sponsor home learning programs, lower the adult-pupil ratio, provide personal attention to students, and alert parents to their children's minor academic difficulties before they become serious problems.

Cummins and Stedman both suggest that the lack of success of educational reforms, especially those aimed at improving the education of minority students, may be due to the barriers that exist between educators and minority students and between schools and minority communities. Clearly, the message they communicate is that educational reform, in and of itself, is not sufficient for improving the educational status of minority students. Educators must create an educational context that is conducive to success and that communicates to students that they are valuable, competent individuals who can succeed in academic arenas. To provide an environment conducive to learning, school districts must endorse a philosophy of cultural pluralism and multicultural education, and instruction must reflect an understanding of how students' linguistic, cultural, and other background characteristics influence learning. Figure 1 provides an informal checklist which can be used to assess whether schools have been successful in providing this positive school climate which empowers minority students (Ortiz, 1988).

Figure 1
Evaluating the Educational Context

For each of the items below, circle "Yes" if the statement is characteristic of your school (or your district, if you prefer). circle "No" if the' statement is not characteristic of your school or district.

Yes No 1. My school/district supports cultural pluralism.

Yes No 2. The curriculum incorporates students' contemporary culture, not only history, customs and holidays.

Yes No 3. The curriculum helps students strike a balance between cultural pride and identity on one hand and appreciation of cultures different from their own on the other.

Yes No 4. The curriculum teaches certain humanistic values such as the negative effects of prejudice and discrimination.

Yes No 5. My school/district is integrated (or facilitates opportunities for cross-cultural interaction).

Yes No 6. Inservices routinely incorporate considerations in teaching linguistically/culturally diverse students.

Yes No 7. Children are encouraged to use their native language.

Yes No 8. The administration supports bilingual education.

Yes No 9. Minority parents are actively encouraged to participate in school activities .

Yes No 10. Training is provided to facilitate involvement of minority parents in their children's education.

Yes No 11. Parents and community members are given opportunities to provide input regarding important decisions.

Yes No 12. Parents and teachers part/cipate in evaluations of school programs.

Yes No 13. Parents are considered to be valuable resources and are involved in the schooling process (e.g., as volunteers, advisory committee members, etc.).

Yes No 14. Standardized tests are used for special education eligibility decisions only if they are normed for multicultural populations.

Yes No 15. Regular classroom (not only bilingual education or ESL) teachers understand how limited English proficient students acquire English competence and incorporate language development activities in subject matter instruction.

Yes No 16. Minority students do as well on achievement tests as do Anglo students.

Yes No 17. Poor students do as well as middle- and upper-income students on tests of academic achievement.

Yes No 18. As much emphasis is given to developing higher cognitive skills as given to basic skill attainment.

Yes No 19. Teachers are facilitators of learning as opposed to transmitters of information and facts.

Yes No 20. Teachers adjust instructional approaches and activities to accommodate culturally-conditioned learning styles.

Yes No 21. Informal assessment is given as much emphasis as is formal assessment in psychoeducational evaluations of linguistically/culturally different students.

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Yes No 22. Teachers are trained in informal assessment procedures.

Yes No 23. Reading and writing instruction is characterized by student control and an emphasis on meaningful communication and creativity.

Yes No 24. Teachers participate in decision-making.

Yes No 25. There is a well-articulated prereferral process in place to assure that students receive appropriate educational opportunities before they are referred to special education.

Yes No 26. The emphasis of assessment is on gleaning information to guide intervention.

Yes No 27. Students participate in school governance.

Yes No 28. Teachers are involved in planning and selecting inservice training topics and activities.

Yes No 29. Teams of educators, parents and community members participate in school improvement plans.

Yes No 30. My school/district would be described as a "happy" place by teachers and by minority students.

Prereferral Intervention: Problem Solving Processes

If students were to be provided positive school and classroom contexts that accommodate their individual differences or learning styles, most learning problems could be prevented. However, it is to be expected that even in these contexts, some students will experience difficulty. In these instances, teachers should cycle through a clinical teaching process in which they try several alternatives to resolve academic and behavior problems, including varying the instructional strategies and/or ensuring that the student has the necessary prerequisites to successfully complete tasks or assignments. If the teacher is unable to resolve the problem, she or he may need the assistance or support of others. If this is the case, it is important that teachers have access to a problem-solving process through which systematic efforts can be made to rule out all possibility that the student can be maintained in the regular classroom program.

Clinical Teaching

Before referring a student, teachers should carefully document adaptations of instruction and programs which have been attempted to improve performance in the mainstream (Garcia & Ortiz, 1988). Adelman (1970) suggests that instruction be carefully sequenced as follows: (a) teach basic skills, subjects, or concepts; (b) reteach skills or content using significantly different strategies or approaches for the benefit of students who fail to meet expected performance levels after initial instruction, and (c) refocus instruction on the teaching of prerequisite skills for students who continue to experience difficulty even after approaches and materials have been modified. Documen-

tation of this teaching sequence is very helpful if the child fails to make adequate progress and is subsequently referred to special education. Referral committees will be able to judge whether the adaptations attempted were appropriate given the student's background characteristics. Ultimately, if the child qualifies for special education services, information about prior instruction is invaluable to the development of individualized educational programs because the types of interventions which work, and those which have met with limited success, are already clearly delineated.

When clinical teaching is unsuccessful, teachers should have immediate access to problem-solving units (Chalfant, Psych, & Moultrie, 1979). Otherwise, the simple passage of time may cause a problem to become so serious that it requires a special education referral. The most common problem-solving processes used by schools involve the use of consultants and/or problem solving teams for prereferral intervention.

Consultation Models

The consultation approach is meant to provide far more immediate service to classroom teachers in a far less structured manner than that involved in the use of problem-solving teams. There are two basic types of consultative models, expert and collegial; these are distinguished primarily by the level of shared knowledge or experience that initially exists among participants in the consultative process (Phillips & McCullough, 1990). In expert models, the relationship is hierarchical, with the consultant serving as the expert and the consultee receiving the expertise. In contrast, in a collegial model, peers join in exchanging specific ideas and experiences to solve problems encountered in areas of mutual understanding or interest.

In expert models, consultants typically offer the teacher advice as to how a problem may be resolved, provide direct intervention with the student, and/or guide him/her through problem identification, analysis, plan implementation, and problem evaluation (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstrom, & Stecker, 1990). The consultant guides the teacher through these stages in a succession of structured interviews, in which specific objectives are accomplished before consultation proceeds to the next stage. Evaluation of interventions is data-based; effectiveness is judged in terms of whether the teacher has reached a previously set goal (e.g., changing the nature or quality of his/her interaction with students) or if the student's behavior has changed in the expected direction. In collegial relationships, the teacher is an equal participant in the process from problem identification to problem evaluation.

While the literature seems to favor collegial approaches to consultation, Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstrom and Stecker (1990) found that teachers prefer expert processes. In the first year of a study of prereferral intervention, they provided extensive training on collaborative consultation but lamented that the resulting in-class interventions were largely unimpressive. Teachers complained that they did not have adequate time to engage in the give-and-take nature of collaborative problem solving and simply wanted to be given helpful suggestions. When more prescriptive approaches were involved (that is, teachers were asked to select from among a limited set of carefully detailed interventions and development of prescriptive instructions and materials to guide them), teachers expressed satisfaction with the consultation process; they did not perceive the expert process to be coercive or denigrating.

Fuchs and his colleagues (1990) conclude that the form and substance of consultation should be consistent with the specifics of the situation. In schools where stress is high and expertise in consultation is not readily available, prescriptive approaches seem to be more successful than collaborative ones. As teachers and others become more confident and experienced in the process, the prescriptive approaches may give way to more collaborative efforts.

One of the major advantages of the consultant model is that teachers do not have to defend their perceptions of the problem before a public gathering of professionals as is typical of problem solving teams and/or referral committees (Pugach & Johnson, 1989). A disadvantage of the approach, though, is that the process, most often, relies on specialists for problem solution, thus creating a situation in which it is easier for teachers to transfer ownership of the problem to individuals they perceive as having specialized skills and knowledge. This is likely to be the case if the consultant assumes responsibility for generating solutions for the problem and then implementing them versus training the teacher to implement the strategy (Pugach & Johnson, 1989).

Problem-Solving Teams

Problem-solving teams generally serve two purposes: (a) they provide immediate, informal assistance to teachers to solve mild learning and behavior problems in the classroom, and (b) they serve as a screening mechanism for determining which students should be referred for a comprehensive individual assessment. Several alternatives for prereferral problem solving have been developed. These include among others, Child Study Teams, Student Assistance Programs, and Teacher Assistance Teams (TAT; Chalfant & Pysh, 1981). Members of the support team meet with the teacher requesting assistance to discuss presenting problems, brainstorm possible solutions, and develop an action plan that is then implemented by the teacher

with the support of team members. The team conducts follow-up meetings to evaluate the effectiveness of the interventions and to develop other instructional recommendations if necessary. In many cases, it is the support team which ultimately decides whether the student should be referred to special education.

The following section summarizes how Teacher Assistance Teams operate (Chalfant & Pysch, 1981; Chalfant, Pysh & Maultrie, 1979). Although the focus of this particular process is on the student, it is also possible that presenting problems may be related to teacher variables or to the characteristics of the classroom environment.

Once the members of the TAT are elected, a team coordinator is named. The coordinator is responsible for overseeing data collection, scheduling meetings, and maintaining records of team meetings. Procedures used require minimal paperwork.

Teacher request for assistance. The teacher identifies a student-related problem and submits a brief, written summary of the problem to the TAT coordinator. The summary includes a description of (a) the performance the teacher desires of the child; (b) the students' strengths and weaknesses; (c) interventions already attempted and the outcomes of these; and (d) other relevant background information, including any available assessment data.

Review of requests for assistance. The TAT coordinator reviews the referral and, if necessary, confers with the referring teacher to clarify data or to obtain additional information about the problem. The coordinator then disseminates copies of the referral to the members of the committee. Team members review the information, pinpoint problem areas, study the interrelationships among these areas, and develop their own recommendations prior to the TAT meeting. This step reduces the amount of time spent discussing the dimensions of the problem at the meeting.

Classroom visits. One of the team members visits the classroom and observes the child to gather additional insights into the problem. While this step of Chalfant et al.'s process is child-centered, the committee should use this opportunity to gather information about the general classroom environment, including teachers, curriculum, and instruction.

Problem-solving meeting. A TAT meeting is held for 30 minutes at which time team members: (a) reach consensus as to the nature of the problem; (b) negotiate one or two objectives with the referring teacher; (c) select the methods, strategies, or approaches the referring teacher will attempt, (d) define responsibility for carrying out the recommendations (who, what, when, where, how, why); and (e) establish a follow-up plan to monitor progress.

Recommendations. The end products of the TAT meeting are specific recommendations for individualizing instruction for the student, recommendations for informal assessment to be conducted by the child's teacher or by team members, and/or referral for special help, including, if the team deems it necessary, referral to special education. Referrals for special help can be teacher-rather than child-focused. For example, an instructional strategy which is unfamiliar to the referring teacher may be recommended. The teacher can request in-service training to learn the strategy, other members of the faculty who have expertise in the recommended approach can demonstrate the strategy, or the team may recommend that the child be integrated into a classroom where such instruction is already being provided. The recommendations are recorded on a form during the meeting and xerox or carbon copies are provided to all team members.

Follow-up meetings. These meetings are held every six to eight weeks to review progress toward solving the problem. If the problem is resolved, techniques which can be used in similar cases are identified; if the interventions are not successful, the team repeats the brainstorming process and selects alternative strategies.

Referrals to other programs. If the LEP student's problems cannot be resolved by the bilingual education or ESL teacher, the TAT may refer the student to compensatory education programs which provide remedial instruction. Unless alternative placements such as these are readily available, referral to special education will continue to be a "trigger" response when teachers or problem-solving teams are unable to improve students' achievement or behavior. To access these alternatives, it is important that teachers understand their purpose and that they be familiar with eligibility criteria for placement (i.e., which students are served by which program). Otherwise, misplacement in special education can continue to occur despite the availability of options such as Chapter 1, migrant education, tutorial programs, and others. (García, 1984).

The quality of available programs must be carefully monitored as there is also well-documented overrepresentation of language minority students in programs such as Chapter 1. This does not usually cause concern or lead to litigation perhaps because these programs are assumed to be beneficial to students (Reschly, 1988) and do not carry the same stigma as a special education label or placement. However, overrepresentation suggests that the regular classroom environment is not effective for these students; rather than channeling students out of the mainstream, attention should be focused on improving these instructional environments.

There are several benefits to the use of Teacher Assistance Teams: teachers are provided a day-to-day peer problem-solving unit

within their school building and thus do not have to experience long delays until external support can be provided (Chalfant, Psych, & Moultrie, 1979). Moreover, a collaborative learning community is established since the team process actually provides continual staff development for all persons involved in the process. Finally, the use of TAT serves to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to special education because most problems can be taken care of by regular education personnel. An additional benefit of the TAT is that the process helps identify problem areas or training needs which, if addressed, can help school personnel deal more effectively with students' learning and behavior problems.

In summary, both consultation models and problem solving teams have been shown to be effective vehicles for operationalizing prereferral intervention. Educators are encouraged to explore the specific type of prereferral process which would be most effective given the characteristics of the school, its personnel, and available resources. It is important not to assume that only one combination of experts and their accompanying skills is adequate to address problems. Therefore, neither the consultation nor the team problem-solving model should be constituted as permanent structures (Graden, 1989).

Institutionalizing Prereferral Intervention

There are many benefits to be gained from the implementation of prereferral intervention strategies. The processes used for problem solving endorse the rights of teachers to assistance and support from colleagues and the educational system (Phillips & McCullough, 1990). They also underscore that such assistance should be provided in a timely manner and that teachers should not have to wait for results of testing before taking action (Pugach & Johnson, 1989). Moreover, numerous opportunities are provided for enhancement of teachers' abilities to respond to the growing diversity of the school population, abilities that are critical, given the nation's changing demography (Phillips & McCullough, 1990). Of utmost importance, given the dramatically increasing number of students identified as being "at risk," is that prereferral intervention is more cost-effective than are remedial programs for students who are not disabled. Special education involves substantially greater expenditures (e.g., for students with mental retardation 1.75 to 2.5 times) than the expenditures per student in regular education or from $2,000 to $4,000 annually (Reschly, 1988). While this is an expenditure that is appropriate when the student is truly disabled, expending this level of resources on non-disabled students can bankrupt the educational system.

Despite the theoretical support of the need for collaboration, true interdisciplinary collaboration is not routinely occurring. School per-

sonnel must thus develop ways to institutionalize this type of effort. Several factors are critical to achieve this end (Phillips & McCullough, 1990, pp. 291-295):

1. School districts must adopt a philosophy endorsing the concept of prereferral intervention, both the prevention and the problem-solving process, and enact policies and procedures consistent with collaborative problem solving. The system must communicate that teacher or student problem resolution merits expenditure of time, energy, and resources.

2. Problem solving teams must develop a collaborative ethic. Central tenets of this ethic are joint responsibility for problems, joint accountability, and a belief that linking talents and resources is mutually advantageous to regular and to special education.

3. The understanding and support of administrators is crucial if prereferral intervention is to be institutionalized. Principals can exert tremendous influence on program success through clear communication of program purpose, goals, and expectations, promotion of a climate in which consultation is valued, provision of leadership and utilization of managerial strategies which facilitate program implementation and maintenance. Because informal prereferral structures are not effective, administrators must ensure that consultation and team meetings can occur routinely.

A number of conceptual and pragmatic barriers to consultation and team problem solving have been identified (Phillips & McCullough, 1990; Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Moore, Fefield, Spira, & Scarlata, 1989). In order for collaborative consultation to occur, the historical separation of special education and regular education must be eliminated. For LEP students, greater collaboration and cooperation between bilingual education and "regular" regular education must be achieved, in addition to strengthening linkages with special education. Attitudinal barriers caused by the lack of understanding of the roles of programs and personnel must be eliminated. This presents a challenge to bilingual educators who have continuously struggled with having to explain the nature and purpose of special language programs not only to regular and special educators but also to the community at large.

In strengthening relationships across programs and personnel, it is important to recognize that the trend toward prereferral intervention may not be eagerly embraced by regular educators. Emphasis on mastery of content and skills which are then measured by standardized achievement testing may cause teachers to refer students to special education and other remedial programs as a way of improving the academic achievement and thus the test scores of the stu-

dents in their classes. This suggests a need for meaningful involvement of staff at all levels in planning and decision making (Phillips & McCullough, 1990) in order to increase the likelihood of successful implementation of prereferral procedures.

Need for Additional Research on Prereferral Intervention

Prereferral intervention programs are increasing in popularity. In a recent survey of 49 state directors of special education, Carter and Sugai (1989) found that 23 state educational agencies required and 11 recommended prereferral intervention; 10 had no prereferral requirements. The broadening support for this type of intervention has occurred in the absence of an adequate data base to support its effectiveness (Fuchs, Fuchs, Bahr, Fernstrom, & Stecker, 1990). These authors conducted an ERIC search which produced only three empirical investigations; they knew of only eight additional published, pertinent studies.

Despite the limited number of studies, available results have been generally encouraging (Phillips & McCullough, 1990). Efficacy reviews of outcome research (e.g., Mannino & Shore, 1975; Medway, 1982; West & Idol, 1987) and meta-analyses of consultation studies (Medway & Updyke, 1985; Sibley, 1986) have revealed positive effects on attitudes and behaviors of consultants, consultees, and clients. Moreover, applied researchers (e.g., Graden, Casey, & Bonstrom, 1985; Ritter, 1978) have suggested that well-designed consultation programs may significantly reduce the number of referrals and the long-term need for consultation services. For example, there is evidence to suggest that prereferral interventions can resolve a significant proportion of behavioral and academic problems and thus eliminate the need for referrals to special education (Ortiz, 1990; Reschly, 1988; Chalfant, 1981; Chalfant, in press).

Chalfant & Pysh (1989) conducted a study of the outcome of 96 Teacher Assistance Teams. They found that of the 386 students staffed by the teams, only 82 or 21 percent were referred for special education services. Of these, 76 percent were found to be eligible. Teachers involved in the process rated the group process as very effective for problem solving and indicated interventions implemented resulted in improvement of student behavior and achievement. Teachers also lauded the moral support provided by their peers. Graden, Casey, and Bonstrom (cited in Carter and Sugai, 1989) conducted a study which showed that in four of the six participating schools, testing and placement rates were decreased significantly as a result of prereferral intervention and that teachers and principals perceived the process to be helpful to students. Ortiz (1990) investi-

gated the use of problem-solving teams on four elementary school campuses in which the majority of students enrolled were Hispanic. She found that of 100 students staffed by these teams, 73 percent were helped without referral to special education. Reschly (1988) cautions that the degree to which results such as these are persistent within settings, maintained across time, and generalized across situations, remains to be established.

The Referral Process

The previous discussion of prereferral intervention is not intended to suggest that referrals to special education are never appropriate. If neither the teacher's adaptations nor the recommendations of consultants or problem-solving teams are effective, then referral to special education should be considered. The data collected through prereferral intervention becomes invaluable to special educators as they move to a comprehensive individual assessment and try to determine whether the student is handicapped and to diagnose the specific disability. The evidence most critical to determining eligibility will accompany the referral, i.e., verification that: (a) the school's curriculum is appropriate; (b) the child's problems are documented across settings and personnel not only in school but also at home; (c) difficulties are present both in the native language and in English; (d) the child has been taught but has not made satisfactory progress; (e) the teacher has the qualifications and experience to effectively teach the student; and (f) instruction has been continuous, appropriately sequenced, and has included teaching of skills prerequisite to success. A child who does not learn after this type of systematic, quality intervention is a likely candidate for special education. If the student is handicapped, the records maintained by teachers and team members can guide the development of the individualized education plan (IEP) as effective and ineffective strategies have already been identified.

Accessing Special Education Services

Referrals to special education indicate that a decision has been reached that the child cannot be served by regular education programs alone, and that she/he may have a disability. The referral process then represents an additional opportunity to determine whether the student's problems can be attributed to factors other than a disability.

Every district is required to have a process for screening referrals. In some instances, an individual will be given responsibility for screening; in others, a group of individuals serves as the screening committee. In either case, the information provided by the referral agent, who is usually the child's teacher, drives referral decisions.

Algozzine and Ysseldyke (1981) examined the extent to which decisions to classify a child as mentally retarded, learning disabled, or emotionally disturbed are influenced by data provided at the time of referral. Results indicated that although all students fell within the normal range, 51 percent of the decision makers in the study declared the students eligible for special education services. The authors conclude that decision makers place considerable weight on information provided in referral information and, as a result, fail to reject stereotypes engendered in the referral statement. The implication of this finding is critical for improving procedures associated with referral of language minority students. If the final placement decision is so heavily weighted by the original referring data, mainstream teachers who are unable to distinguish those students in their classrooms whose performance is indicative of normal second language development from those who exhibit a true handicapping condition risk making an inappropriate referral, thereby effectively resigning the referred student to special education placement.

Given this, referral information should help distinguish linguistic, cultural, and other student differences from disabilities. Referral data should include information such as the following:

1. The student's current educational status, including attendance, grades, achievement data, and classroom observations;

2. Results of the *home language survey*;

3. Up-to-date descriptions of the *student's use of the native language and English language, including measures of basic interpersonal communication skills and academic language proficiency* (Cummins, 1984);

4. Documentation of previous educational efforts and strategies provided for the student and the results of these efforts, including *participation in or consideration for other special programs* operated by the district;

5. Documentation of recent vision and hearing screening;

6. An updated general health history or documentation of recent medical evaluations;

7. *Other information reported or provided by parents.*

Documentation of any decisions made by the bilingual education placement committee should always be included for limited English proficient students.

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Committee Process

Referral activities are conducted very much like the prereferral problem-solving process; a team is brought together to deliberate available information about a student and to render a decision as to whether the child should be referred for a comprehensive individual assessment. If the referral committee determines that the child is not eligible for special education services, they usually recommend alternatives such as the following: (a) adjusting the student's educational program, (b) returning the student to the regular classroom with teaching recommendations provided to support the teacher, or (c) referring the student for consideration by other programs. If it is concluded that a child is not eligible for special education services, the referral committee, or the placement committee if the decision is made after the comprehensive individual assessment, usually recommends that additional modifications of the child's educational program be made; and/or that the student be considered for placement in compensatory or remedial programs. If a prereferral process is in place, referral committees can access this support system so that the teacher can be given assistance with students who have educational needs but who cannot be served in special education.

Representation on Prereferral and Referral Committees

A major debate associated with the prereferral intervention is whether consultants and/or members of problem-solving teams should be regular or special educators. Chalfant and Pysh (1981) argue that Teacher Assistance Teams *should not* involve special education personnel (e.g., special education teachers or psychologists) or other specialists, except when they are invited to serve as consultants to the committee. The presence of principals and special educators on teams may create conflicts for teachers; for example, they may be threatened because the principal normally serves an evaluative role and teachers may worry that their request for assistance will be interpreted as lack of competence. They may interpret the presence of a special educator as indicating that a referral is imminent (Phillips & McCullough, 1990). As a matter of fact, Graden (1989) suggests that rather than ***pre***referral intervention, the problem-solving process should be called *intervention assistance*. She cautions that teachers may interpret the term prereferral as simply signaling a step or action that has to be taken before the actual referral is made, rather than as a process aimed at preventing unnecessary referrals from occurring.

While reliance on specialists is a common criticism of the use of consultation models for prereferral intervention, Graden (1989) takes

issue with the description of special educators as experts who intimidate teachers and who are unable to collaborate by virtue of their roles and titles. She suggests that such a posture is counterproductive to establishing more effective linkages between regular and special education. Rather than categorizing individuals on the basis of their roles, greater attention should be given to the skills and background they have to offer.

Ortiz (1990) concurs but argues that while availability of peer support is more important that team membership, the success of teams comprised of regular classroom teachers suggests that greater consideration should be given to the use of such teams of regular classroom teachers for prereferral intervention. A committee structure in which membership involves only regular classroom teachers (at least a majority of) emphasizes that prereferral intervention is under the authority, and is the responsibility, of the ***regular*** education system. It is this authority which distinguishes the ***prereferral*** from the ***referral*** process. Moreover, relying on regular educators allows specialists to spend more time on tasks for which they are uniquely trained (e.g., conducting assessment, serving on special education referral committees, providing direct services to students with disabilities, etc.).

While it is argued that special educators and certain other specialists (e.g., principals) should not serve as consultants or be members of problem-solving teams, the prereferral process should involve individuals with expertise associated with the education of limited English proficient students. Such expertise will be very helpful as team members attempt to rule out any possibility that a student's problems might be the result of differences in language, culture, socioeconomic status, or to not having had opportunities to learn. While initially these individuals may be seen as having specialized knowledge and skills relative to second language acquirers, this expertise must be shared by all regular educators. Otherwise, it will be impossible to achieve the type of educational context described previously in which all personnel understand the influence of language, culture, and other background characteristics in order to prevent academic problems from occurring. Both the consultation and problem-solving team process are excellent vehicles for sharing this expertise and moving it to becoming commonplace knowledge on school campuses.

Individuals with bilingual education and English as a second language expertise should also serve on referral committees. Ideally, this representative would be the classroom teacher if the child is limited English proficient and/or a representative from the bilingual education placement committee. These individuals can help interpret student behavior in light of linguistic and cultural characteristics. They would also be of great assistance in obtaining information

about the child from parents and in helping understand the prereferral-referral-assessment-placement process. Second language program personnel can also offer invaluable assistance in configuring an assessment process that will ensure that performance is the native and the English language is accurately described and to ensure that assessments provide data appropriate to programming for instruction in both the first and the second language.

Summary

The anticipated outcomes of the implementation of prereferral intervention strategies include: (a) a reduction in the number of students perceived to be "at risk" by regular classroom teachers because of teachers' increased abilities to handle the naturally occurring diversity of skills and characteristics of students in their classes; (b) reduction in the number of students referred to special education; (c) reduction in the number of students inappropriately labeled as handicapped, particularly in programs for the learning disabled; and (d) improved student outcomes, especially in oral language and literacy skills.

Serving students in the mainstream is more cost-effective than placing them in special education, especially if the student is not handicapped. More important perhaps are the long-term benefits to students themselves. They will have a greater chance of achieving their social, political, and economic potential because they are provided an appropriate education and are spared the stigma of an inaccurate special education label.

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Response to Alba Ortiz's Presentation

Ann C. Willig
Florida Atlantic University

In addressing issues related to the assessment of systems for referring language-minority (LM) children to special education, Dr. Ortiz mentioned four points which emphasize that schools in this country are failing to meet the needs of LM children: (1) there continues to be a very high dropout rate from school for LM children; (2) over-representation of LM children in special education continues, especially in the area of learning disabilities and communication disorders; (3) there are large numbers of LM children in special education classes who really don't belong there; and (4) many LM children assigned to special education show a progressive decline of scores on intellectual and achievement tests over their years in special education. These points highlight three major areas of need that must be resolved if special education is to provide LM students with appropriate services: first, the need to reduce inappropriate referrals to special education, second, the need to reduce inappropriate placements for those students who are referred, and third, the need for appropriate instruction in special education classrooms for LM children who truly need special education.

Reduction of Inappropriate Referrals

As Dr. Alba Ortiz implies, the root of the problem of over-referral to special education is not in the referral and assessment systems per se, but in the nature of the regular, or non-special education programs that are offered to LM students in this country. Behaviors and characteristics of LM students that precipitate their referral are frequently produced by inappropriate educational programs and instruction that does not meet their needs. Reduction of inappropriate referrals to special education will best be accomplished through the assessment and improvement of general education programs offered to all LM students -- a task that is outside the realm of special education.

A first step in the assessment of general education is the examination of schools for all the characteristics that Dr. Ortiz listed in her paper, that is, the promotion of collaboration with parents and communities, the provision of culturally relevant education using techniques of effective multicultural education, the building upon language and knowledge that children bring to school, and the provision of meaningful and comprehensible instruction. Inappropriate refer-

rals to special education will continue until schools can receive acceptable grades on these characteristics of their programs for English-learning students.

There is recent information and research evidence related to two of the areas of effective schooling for LM students that I would like to comment upon. The first concerns language-learning needs of children and instructional methods, the second addresses the language of instruction as a mediating factor in parent involvement.

Language Needs and Language Instruction

Findings from one recent study have classroom implications that are best understood when one considers the language development process in children. Current theories of language and cognition suggest that these are developed through a process of trying to make sense of our environment and to figure out the rules that govern our world and lives. In the case of language, this process includes three basic steps. The first is listening to language in our environments and trying to sort out what we hear until it makes sense to us with some degree of consistency. This is similar to a scientist who conducts preliminary observations of a particular phenomenon and then tries to make sense of these observations. In trying to make sense of observations, one begins to form hypotheses about relationships between various phenomenon and to figure out rules that may govern the patterns observed. Children do this when learning language, whether it be their first, second, or third language, as is evidenced in part by grammatical over-regularization (Dale, 1976) in young children who say such things as "I doed it," "I didn't spilled it," and so forth. Children try to figure out the rules.

Following preliminary observations and the development of hypotheses, more systematic observations are done and hypotheses are tested out. These must be tested, not just once but many times, until repeated observations confirm the consistency of results, just as repeated experiments are performed in scientific disciplines to confirm consistency of results. Anyone who has listened to young children ask the same questions over and over or heard them repeat the same sounds or phrases in many different situations has observed this hypothesis testing.

In short, the process includes two stages of observation plus hypothesis-formation and hypothesis testing. When children learn a language, they must be provided with data that serve as a basis for observation and hypothesis formation, that is, they must hear meaningful language in their environment. Just as important, they must be provided with the opportunity to test their language-learning hypotheses through language production and interaction with other in-

dividuals. Language learning hypotheses are confirmed or disconfirmed by the way other individuals respond to these language production efforts.

The point of the above is that a crucial ingredient of appropriate instruction for English-learning students is the provision of opportunities to practice language and to test out language-learning hypotheses through real interaction with teachers and peers.

If we were to assess our schools on a grand scale for just this one ingredient of appropriate instruction for English-learning students, we would come up very short. Classroom evidence from several nationwide studies indicates that teachers provide little opportunity for students to produce language in meaningful ways.

The recent nationwide study conducted by David Ramirez and his colleagues (Ramirez, J.D., Pasta, D.J., Yuen, S.D., Billings, D.K., and Ramey, D.R., 1991) provides evidence in this respect. Ramirez and his colleagues set out to compare three types of programs for English-learning students -- immersion, early-exit, and late-exit bilingual programs.

In order to compare the effectiveness of these programs, the researchers had to examine the quality of instruction in each program to make sure that any program effects could be attributed to the program models and not to differences in the quality of instruction provided by the teachers. The result of classroom observations and careful documentation of teacher-student interactions indicated that, in each of the three types of program, approximately 95 percent or more of the classroom interactions were teacher-initiated and consisted of display questions, that is, questions that require responses of only a few words and that merely display memorization or rote recall of facts. Crucial language-production opportunities were not provided for students in these programs.

The finding itself is not surprising. What is surprising is that these observations were in programs especially designed to meet the needs of English-learning students. Failing to provide opportunities for meaningful language production means failing to meet the needs of these students.

That this finding is not surprising stems from other research which indicates that the above describes the prevalent mode of teaching in our country. Ventriglia (personal communication) described data from two nationwide studies in which she analyzed more than 13 million teacher and student interaction chains collected in regular education classrooms of standard English, ESL classrooms, and native language instruction classrooms. Her findings were similar to those of Ramirez and colleagues, that is, approximately 95 percent of

the interactions in the regular and ESL classrooms were teacher-initiated and called for short answers that displayed rote recall of facts.

As much as we may decry this situation, we cannot fall into the trap of blaming teachers. Teachers teach in the way that they have been trained. The findings above call for changes in the way that teachers are trained, where the content of training is conveyed through methods that teachers will be expected to use, that is, interactive methods that provide students with opportunities to test language hypotheses, to express themselves, and to develop critical thinking skills as opposed to simply recalling facts. It is imperative that those who conduct both preservice and in-service programs for teachers begin to focus on the need for interactive teaching methods and on conveying training content through the use of those methods. Since teachers teach in the way they've been taught, they must be taught in the way they should teach.

Parent Involvement and Language Issues

A second area in which Dr. Ortiz calls for the assessment of schools in reference to LM students is the degree and nature of parent involvement in the schools. Although there are many cultural issues related to involving LM parents, findings from two recent studies have implications for this issue.

The first of these findings was incidental findings of Ramirez and his colleagues in the study mentioned earlier. This group found that the greatest amount of parent involvement with children's schooling was in the late-exit bilingual programs where native language instruction was used during a considerable portion of the time. There was less such parent involvement in the early-exit and structured immersion programs. Authors of the study suggest this may be due to the fact that parents in the late-exit program, where more of the instruction was provided in the native language, were better able to understand both the language of their child's instruction and the school's expectations for parent and child.

Findings from another recent study also raise cogent questions concerning the relationship among parents, families, and schools and highlight the need for additional research. Wong Fillmore (1991) and a group of volunteer researchers surveyed 3,000 families of LM children who were in all-English early childhood programs. Parents reported that not only were their children losing their first language, but this loss created consequent disruptions in parent-child interactions and relationships because parents and grandparents could no longer communicate with the children.

These two studies point to the need for further examination of language factors that mediate involvement of LM parents in their children's education. I challenge researchers to tackle the host of questions that arise in this regard. Clearly, additional research on parent involvement with respect to possible language mediation is called for.

Cultural Relevancy and Learning

A third characteristic of schools that adequately meet the needs of LM children is cultural relevancy. Three major areas where cultural relevancy affects the school experience are teacher and student interactions, curriculum and materials, and classroom management as related to teaching structures.

With regard to teacher and student interactions, teachers need to be trained in the many varieties of cross-cultural interaction and communication styles and must be cognizant of the cultural bases of their own individual styles. They also need to learn about interaction styles in the specific cultural groups represented by their students so that interactions with the teacher can be meaningful to the children and misunderstandings reduced. We all know stories of children who have been unknowingly rejected by a teacher because of a mismatch of communication styles, or children who have been encouraged and stimulated to academic productivity because a teacher knew how to use culturally appropriate means of encouragement.

Curriculum and curricular materials are another means of providing culturally relevant education. Cultural relevancy can be introduced in curricular materials through effective techniques of multicultural education. This does not mean adding on units about specific cultures so children in the classroom who represent a minority culture feel like they're being put under a microscope and their differences magnified. Instead, this means infusing multiple perspectives, or the viewpoints of several cultural groups in every possible aspect of the curriculum. For example, when studying history and current events, viewpoints of all participants in the events should be presented and examined by the students in the light of cultural beliefs. An example that has recently been in the forefront of teaching news is the controversy surrounding the discovery of North America and the perspectives that lead people to accept or reject the notion that the continent was "discovered." The notion that the continent was discovered is the perspective of only one group of people. Another example illustrates presentation of multiple perspectives at the preschool level. Although not ostensively a cultural topic, it definitely presents a different perspective. This is the children's book that recounts the story of the Three Little Pigs as told from the viewpoint of the Big Bad Wolf.

Culturally appropriate classroom management and structuring of activities can also influence learning as is demonstrated in the classical research of the Kamehameha Institute in Hawaii (Au and Mason, 1981). In that research, changing the structure of the classroom by using learning groups and activities that were consistent with the way children learned at home was associated with substantial increases in the reading scores of the students.

In assessing the appropriateness of the education provided for LM students in our schools, consideration of teacher-student interaction, curriculum and curricular materials, and classroom structuring must certainly be considered. If education is to be improved for LM students in our schools, most certainly these aspects of cultural relevancy will need to be improved.

Further Reduction of Referral and Placements

Once inappropriate referrals to special education have been reduced through improvement of the educational programs offered to all LM students, inappropriate referrals and inappropriate placements can further be reduced through specific procedures that ensure everything possible is done to solve an individual child's educational problem without referral to and placement in special education. In this regard, Dr. Ortiz has outlined and suggested detailed procedures that draw upon both her own work and relevant literature.

Although the pre-referral procedures outlined by Dr. Ortiz are comprehensive and include a number of features designed to prevent inappropriate referrals of specific individuals, it is noteworthy that these suggested procedures are all outside the realm of special education. Within the regular educational program or classroom, all possible efforts must be made to identify and resolve a LM child's problem. Only when such efforts have not succeeded should a child be referred for special education assessment. Once such a referral is made, a comprehensive assessment process should then pinpoint the source of the child's problem and determine whether special education placement is warranted.

An important characteristic of the pre-referral process to be implemented in the regular education program is team collaboration of regular education personnel, including bilingual and ESL personnel, to assist the child's teacher in identifying specific problems and in devising appropriate intervention strategies. Although employment of intervention strategies has always been a recommended procedure, the lack of collaboration and assistance provided to a teacher has resulted in a restricted range of intervention options implemented for short periods of time that usually fail to make a difference. In examining more than 1,000 special education records of LM

students (Willig, Wilkinson and Polyzoi, 1985), my colleagues and I repeatedly noted this paucity of attempted alternatives and the lack of adequate documentation for the trial time periods. The procedures outlined by Dr. Ortiz, which include input and support for the teacher of personnel from regular programs in collaboration with ESL and bilingual teachers, are bound to improve the probability that problems will be resolved for individual children without progression to special education referral and placement. Conversely, the probability of identifying those students who truly need special education services and the provision of appropriate placements will be enhanced.

In sum, inappropriate referrals to special education could be reduced to a minimum through the combination of improved and appropriate regular education programs for LM students and improved pre-referral procedures to resolve specific problems. Concurrent to the attempts to accomplish this goal, an additional problem must be tackled -- the nature of instruction provided for LM students in special education classrooms.

Improving Instruction for LM Students in Special Education Classrooms

Dr. Ortiz' data indicate a reduction over time in achievement and intelligence test scores for LM children who had been placed in special education. Such data attest to the need for improvement in the nature of instruction provided to these children. Among the many problems that have been observed and documented in special education classes for LM children is the amount of individualized instruction that is actually provided, the types of teaching methods and strategies used, and inappropriate language instruction and lack of access to ESL and bilingual programs.

Although LM children are often referred to special education in hopes that they will receive more individualized instruction, several research studies have found that they may actually receive less individualized instruction in the special education classroom than if they had stayed in the regular classroom. These problems stem from the fact that frequently, pupil-teacher ratios are no different in special education classrooms than in regular classrooms and there is usually greater heterogeneity in the special education room. Resource rooms often contain students from three or four different grade levels at one time with only one teacher and sometimes an aide. Self-contained classrooms may be even more heterogeneous because of the aggregation of children who are diagnosed as mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, and even physically disabled with visual or auditory handicaps. Add to this a group of children with a range of language proficiency levels in two languages and it becomes

extremely difficult for the special education teacher to attend to individual needs in an effective manner.

Examples of the lack of individualized instruction for LM students in special education were evident in research I conducted several years ago with Jana Swedo (Willig and Swedo, 1987). In this study, classroom observations of LM students in special education were videotaped and analyzed for the level of task engagement under different instructional conditions. In one instance, we observed a child's individual reading session with the teacher for a ten-minute period of instruction. During eight minutes of that time allotment, the child waited in silence while the teacher attended to the many interruptions that occurred from others in the classroom. The result is that the individual reading instruction amounted to less than two minutes for that child!

To improve classroom instruction for LM students in special education, classroom management strategies must be examined and improved along with the conditions that precipitate management problems. Additionally, overcrowding special education classrooms with LM students will improve only when the assessment and improvement of regular education, as discussed earlier in this paper, occurs with consequent reductions in inappropriate special education placements.

In addition to reducing conditions that precipitate problems that limit availability of individualized instruction, improvement in special education for LM students requires an examination and adaptation of the nature of instruction offered to these students.

Sometimes changes in instruction must be radically different from the traditional task-analysis based instruction in which special education teachers have typically been trained. I observed an example of such an extreme change and the results it produced in one special education classroom of fifth and sixth grade Hispanic students. The observed student was a fifth grade Hispanic boy who had been placed in special education. In his first five years of schooling, this child had never written anything other than his name.

During the observations I made in that classroom, the teacher was experimenting with process writing as it has been described by Graves. In the first step of the writing process, children were given a story starter and asked to finish the story in any way they wanted. After completing a story, the children would read their first draft to the rest of the class, get comments, and then revise. This classroom had the highest rate and degree of task engagement of all activities observed over several months in a number of similar classrooms (Willig & Swedo, 1987). For almost and hour and a half, these fifth grade special education children were glued to their papers, writing furiously.

During the observations I conducted over a period of about six weeks, the one child mentioned, who had never written anything in the first five years of school, wrote one sentence as a story. When called upon to do so, he stood up and very haltingly read this sentence to his classmates. The students in the class had been instructed to tell each author what they liked about each story and to ask questions for clarification. When this child heard several others say there was something they liked about his sentence, he got so enthused that, by the following week, when I again visited the classroom, he had expanded the one sentence to a paragraph. By the third week, he had again read to his classmates, received more feedback, and expanded his story to a whole page of original writing! Of course, the spelling and other surface features left a lot to be desired, but this was the first time in the five years of schooling of this child that he had written anything other than his name.

The point of this is that attempts to modify instruction to produce substantial changes in outcomes will most likely require more than the minor types of modifications that teachers have been used to making at the pre-referral stage.

In summary, special education will be able to serve LM students effectively only when inappropriate referrals and placements are reduced through general improvements in regular education programs that preclude the need for many referrals, and through adequate pre-referral strategies such as those outlined by Dr. Ortiz, that reduce inappropriate referrals of specific children. Furthermore, for those LM students who truly need special education services, there is need for change in the nature of the services and instruction that is provided so that these more specifically address the language and learning needs of these children.

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Response to Alba Ortiz's Presentation

Sherry R. Migdail
COMSIS Corporation, Mid-Atlantic MRC

I'm glad Ann told you a spelling story. I had not planned one but since this is Washington, DC, and it is a Washington spelling story, I'll toss it in.

This has to do with a new teacher whom we hired for a Washington private school. She had never lived in this city and knew little about its demography. I was in her classroom the first morning as she had asked and she was giving a spelling pretest to find out what the kids could really do when I came in to her second grade. She was very traditional and she said to them, "I will say a word, use it in a sentence, repeat the word, and then you may write the word on your paper." And she started with two or three words, the students were following her directions and things were going along well. Finally she said, "lawyer -- my father is a lawyer" and before she could repeat the word, "lawyer," 19 of the 20 youngsters looked up and said with some amazement, "Your father is a lawyer -- too?"

I don't know how many of you may have stayed up last night to see the remarkable interview with Gorbachov and Yeltsin with Peter Jennings. This is a good time to talk about the Russians. The interview reminded me of something from Anna Karenina. Tolstoy says, at some point in the book, all happy families resemble one another, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. I think we can transpose this to children who are having difficulty in classrooms. Each has difficulty in his/her own way.

Many years ago when my family moved back to Washington following a number of years of living in Mexico City, our older daughter was seven years old. We registered her at a local suburban school in second grade commensurate with both her age and her previous schooling. Her English, at the time, was heavily accented although she had a fair oral knowledge of the language, her schooling had been in Spanish, for the most part.

She had been at school for but two weeks when I received a rather frantic call from the principal.

"Your daughter," she said, "cannot read."

"Cannot read -- what?" I asked.

"Cannot read what we ask her to read -- a second grade book!"

"In what language?" I asked.

The exasperated women exploded on the other end of the phone.

"Can't read in English -- that's what we teach!"

"Is that all? Try her in Spanish -- she reads quite well for a seven year old!"

"What good is that," she cried -- "we only know English."

Then she added something that was key to thinking then and still is now, "and," she said, "you are not a Spanish family -- are you?"

Our name, as you can see is not Gonzales or Rodriguez and we were not expected to know anything but English.

Well -- of course in a very short order Lori was reading in English as well as in Spanish, but it took some doing for the principal to be convinced that she would and that she was not to be placed "back" in first grade! Testing would have determined that she was "limited English proficient" but fortunately for us the term had not yet been coined. She was not even strictly a minority language student since her family was in no way "minority." But the principal clung to the idea that she needed another "year" to become English proficient.

We all know that many children who come to school with a language other than English are for that reason overage in grade in this country.

Some years ago when I worked for the equivalent of "Head Start" in Mexico, a Guarderia Nacional for all children of ministry employees, the task for the summer was to teach a course in assessment methods and to devise or adapt instruments suited to the needs of that country. They were interested in both psychological evaluations and in a set of evaluations which could help determine possible learning problems. There were several adaptations of the Wechsler Scale for Children, which many of you know very well. Since there was no standardization of the Scale, I was asked to bring with me the Psychological Corporation Wechsler translated in the United States. I gave the test in Spanish to a youngster who had no connection with the center but he lived in the neighborhood. He was a bright, easy to talk to child and rapport was established very quickly. My purpose in giving the test was to demonstrate the futility of direct translation and the even greater dilemma in assessment when normative data is not based on a representative sample. In this case, the test was translated in the United States and distributed in Mexico.

One of the comprehension questions was very well translated; the words in Spanish exist and the translation is possible.

"Why is it better to give money to an organized charity than to a street beggar?"

The boy listened patiently, and with a kind of quizzical expres-

sion on his face asked what an "organized charity" was. I made every effort to explain but the concept of organized charity was not within the ken of this child -- nor is it a well defined concept in Mexico. Again he listened until he felt he understood. He took me gently by the arm and led me to the window. And he said, gently, "...you mean better than to give the money to my mother?" There she was with several of his younger siblings -- begging.

I brought a 16 year-old child from a village in Oaxaca to live with us in Maryland some years back. She was the daughter of our housekeeper, and I felt that her mother needed one of her children with her and had promised that when my older ones were in college and there was room, she could come.

She arrived on a Friday and by Monday I had an appointment with the teachers in her high school. The meeting was a professional courtesy and I was grateful. She sat between her mother and me and I explained to the group that she had village schooling. She is from Telistlahuaca and for any of you who know southern Mexico it is about a couple of days burro ride from the capital. When you get to the village and ask for her grandmother's house, you are told that it is "under the Pepsi Cola sign." You can't miss the sign, but if you do you are out of the village.

I had known the child most of her life and she always appeared to be a bright and capable person. We had her grades and they were well within the average range. I explained the 1-10 grading system and described her school and something about how she was taught.

It was the counselor who broke the ice.

She stood over the child and spoke in a loud and clear voice beginning with, "IF I SPEAK SLOW--LY YOU WILL UNDERSTAND ME." The child, seated between her mother and myself, elbowed us both as she hissed between her teeth, " Y esa loca...quien es?" (And this nut - who is she?)

And one other story from my perspective. I was in La Paz, Bolivia, at the San Andres University doing a presentation to a group of students and teachers. The topic -- second language acquisition and the implication for classrooms. Many of you know that there are two important languages in Bolivia, Aymara and Quechua. The bilingual issues have to do with getting Aymara and Quechua children comfortably into Spanish speaking classrooms. At one point during the discussion period, one of the young professors stood up to ask a question. It became a minispeech. "Was the estimable doctora aware," he started, "that here in Bolivia there has been a considerable body of research and experience related to the Aymara and Quechua people and that there is unrefutable evidence that because of brain struc-

ture which is different for these persons than for Spanish speaking Bolivians, it is now proven, that learning Spanish is not possible for them." And with this startling statement he took to the board and drew a crude representation of the brain and while he drew he commented about how, because of certain formations in the brain structure, Aymara and Quechua people would not succeed...would not learn...and it was useless to try.

"Was the good doctor aware of this ongoing research work and could I comment?"

Before I had a chance to even get the astonished look from my face, a gentleman from the back of the room spoke in almost hushed tones. His anger was overriding despite the restrained tone of voice. He spoke in beautiful Spanish:

He began.

"Siendo Aymara..." "As an Aymara, I need to make certain things clear. When I was a child, they came to my village from I think the ministry of education. They came with books and with "tests" and they had all us answer questions. They spoke in Spanish and we in Aymara and there was no way we children could answer their questions. They came away calling us dullards -- it was then that I knew what I had to do...and I can assure you that I have not swayed from my mission. I am at this university to be sure that Aymara and Quechua children no longer have to be "dullards." What happened to me will not happen to my children."

I can still feel my reaction of that moment. I never answered the professor's question -- it was answered far better than I could have done.

Why do I start my comments this way? They are not amusing stories -- but they are real and they happen in one version or another everyday and in many places.

In each case, one very different from the other, the children were not behaving as the school wanted them to -- my child was not programmed in English and, therefore, from the viewpoint of the school, she needed another year in first grade until she met the "standard." Perhaps then she would be "grade appropriate" for content. The Mexican child obviously gave the wrong answer about how organized charities and his mother were related. You and I know the problem was that I gave the wrong test. The child from a Oaxacan village who knew no English was treated in a most demeaning manner! And she knew it! And my Aymara friend went through what we know continues to happen not only a continent away but also in this

country when children are put into inappropriate placement because they can't pass the test. We know an inappropriate test will give you inappropriate results.

Dr. Alba Ortiz redefines pre-referral intervention in her paper. It is her feeling that the traditional framework may be too narrow and she redirects pre-referral as having two major components:

First, "a prevention component aimed at establishing educational environments conducive to the academic success of language minority students so that problems will not occur in the first place," and second, "a problem-solving component in which the teacher first adapts instruction and/or the classroom environment to improve student performance and then requests assistance from others if problem solving efforts are not successful."

In her comprehensive paper, she also elaborates on the phase from referral to assessment to placement. I especially agree with the need for collaborative/school community relationships, especially with the parents of the children. Call them once when a child has a good day and you will have made a friend for life -- for you and for the child. Obviously, cultural and linguistic incorporation in the curriculum means a whole lot more than hanging a pinata in the middle of the room as you convince yourself you've done your bit for the Hispanic children. The use of interactive approaches to language minorities is essential.

It is interesting that many years after our second stint in Latin America our third child told us a story I can't forget. Remember we are not Hispanics...we lived abroad and brought home to this country children who were Spanish speaking -- at that point -- Spanish dominant! It seems that our young Karen, then about seven, was in the hall in an excellent suburban school and overheard two teachers, both hers, talking about a trip the class was to make. They were talking about what benefits were to be derived from the excursion when one said, "...all but Karen. It's too bad she doesn't understand much -- you know her family speak Spanish." Where were the high expectations teachers know we need for successful schooling for a Spanish-dominant child?

I might add that it took years before Karen really liked school!

I want to briefly make mention of Dr. Ortiz's emphasis on students who may be inappropriately placed for years in special education on the basis of a poorly planned assessment. Dr. Ortiz indicates in her paper:

"...after three years of special education placement, Hispanic students who were classified as learning disabled had actually lost

ground. Their verbal and performance IQ's were lower than at initial entry."

The paper also reviews the characteristics of "empowerment" pedagogy stressed by Jim Cummins. I would like to extend those characteristics and apply them to assessment procedures.

- genuine dialogue between student and teacher

Ask the right questions -- assume the individual you are speaking with doesn't need a loud voice, or sign language, but recognize that the student's language can be assessed as you get him to talk with you. In writing, try a dialogue journal, emphasize process writing, build a "portfolio." Keep a record of his work, chronologically and thereby see a pattern of growth with the student alongside. Show and Tell! Tell him he can do it and show him where he has made progress. If some of this sounds familiar better deja vu than to be marking time in place.

- encouragement of student-student talk in a collaborative learning context

- focus on developing higher level cognitive skills rather than factual recall. To do this, you must recognize that a language minority student has the ability and capacity for higher level cognitive skills.

I was quite concerned when Dr. Ginsburg felt that he did not have a clue as to why there was a disproportionate number of language minority kids in special education. He felt that one important research question should be, "...what are the characteristics of kids in special education?" We know those characteristics....I want to know the characteristics of the teachers who put the kids there in the first place! They need help!

If we were to use the model of interactive pedagogy as a basis for interactive assessment then we assess children not parts of children and language, not in its small bits -- but as a whole.

One can even make some pretty accurate "guesses" in interactive assessment about kids who are limited English but who have a good "sense" of language. One gets a feeling about intonation and rhythm. One can appreciate the functionality of language; the effectiveness of a student's ability to communicate. Does this kid get his message across? To what extent? Does he have an inner ear and hear himself and does he begin to make corrections. This metacognition is a very important feature of second language learning in a very practical sense. When you learn a second language you hear it in your

head and if it doesn't "sound right" you try to fix it before you actually say a word or phrase.

And let's not stop there. You also get a good feeling for affect and for risk-taking behaviors, for motivation, for anxiety.

Pre-referral, bearing both Ortiz components in mind, prevention and problem solving, eliminates much of the disorientation if and when teachers are given the guidance they need. I suggest that in the Ortiz context of "referral teams" the best "team" is a group of teachers who see the student in a variety of contexts -- physical education, music, classroom, ESOL and so on. Build in the notion that diagnosis is for improvement of instruction not for finding remediative procedures.

I am presupposing a system where there is, to use Dr. Ortiz's phrase, "a collaborative learning community on the school's campus."

But I need to also talk briefly about the student who, despite all efforts, will and does experience difficulty. Dr. Ortiz's paper discusses clinical teaching, which, with the best of skill and intentions, does not always work. Often, it is not just help with reading. If we agree that a percentage of youngsters have neurologically-based learning problems, then this population will also have its share.

In this geographic area, Washington DC, and environs, there are between 60 and 80 languages spoken by the students in public schools. The largest number is Spanish speaking. Others include Chinese, Vietnamese, Kymer, Loatian, Urdu, Hindi, Gjuarati, Portugese, Swedish, Croatian, Polish, Russian, all middle European languages, Greek; even Yap, Chomorro, Hausa, Igbo and Sango.

One of our major local school systems began a team approach for bilingual assessment in 1980. I was its founding member. Over the years the process has been refined and the team has been expanded; bilingual interpreters for a number of languages, a bilingual consultant psychologist, a bilingual speech and language therapist, and counselors are available.

We were, in 1980, concerned about the language minority child who was "suspected of being handicapped" and for whom an assessment might be indicated. Looking back at those early years I am convinced that we were on the right track. Our team was responsible for working with the teacher initially, for gathering data and developmental, social, and educational histories; for classroom visits; for meeting with parents and talking with them about their expectations for their children, finding the right question to ask and, finally for assessing the student and making recommendations.

We did workshops for the schools, including for the speech and language people, Head Start teachers, and other specialists, and we talked with school administrators about individual children and about our work in general. We looked for trends -- and we found them.

There were too few of us -- and too many of them! The needs and the demands on our time were very great. I am certain they still are. About five years later we did some internal research. Numbers of students we had seen, ages, gender, their time in the country and in the schools, their grade level at the time of the initial referral, parental information, and so forth.

Our hypothesis was that of the group of close to a thousand children who had been assessed by the Team, the smallest number would be designated as needing some form of "special education." We were right. Of that special education needs group, we found a number of youngsters who were learning and/or language disordered. The largest number was in need of extra attention.

We found that despite good oral skills many of the children were being referred by fourth to seventh grade teachers. Logically it was because the students were an enigma despite good oral skills, "He knows English as well as I" kind of syndrome. Reading in English was difficult -- many read but did not comprehend easily or comfortably. Writing skills were even less well developed. These students were not disabled -- they needed additional help. Any number of these kids were not being recognized for what they could do. I remember children who were undoubtedly gifted or talented but unrecognized. I remember children who were bored to tears, overage in grade...and I remember confused parents.

Learning disabilities is an American concept...it really is. Other countries have rushed onto the bandwagon but they have not yet confided the l.d. phenomenon to parents -- certainly not parents in rural schools in Salvador or Guatemala. They come here -- hard working people who want to improve the lot of their children -- and are told that the child they brought from Matahualpa or Esquintla who functioned pretty well at home is "disabled."

We must train our teachers to appreciate the essence of "cultural difference." It is of vital importance to know something about where people come from and what "disability" may denote in other cultures.

Let me conclude with two "cultural" stories. The first is lovely and touching and certainly a tribute to hardworking and dedicated ESL and Bilingual teachers. The second is a firm illustration of what we need to know but may always be afraid to ask!

A group of us were in a meeting with an Ethiopian parent whose six children were in a local school. An explanation was given for the child's problem and a suggestion was made that the boy be "temporarily" put in a special class. He was academically below grade -- at least a couple of years. He was an Amharic speaker and English was just beginning to make sense. He could barely read. The father had been employed at the American air base in Ethiopia and spoke English well enough not to need an interpreter. He was adamant about keeping the child, about 10 years-old, in a mainstream class. His final word was a strong and powerful argument.

"Give him a chance," he said. "I am grateful for your interest and I know you mean to help my son. But I need you to know he was born in a cave above Addis Ababa during our troubles at home and I don't care when he reads. I am grateful for his life and I know he needs time to grow."

A second story concerns a youngster, the son of a Nigerian diplomat. The child's father had the permitted number of wives: four -- and a great number of siblings. He was referred for special education but needed a psychological assessment to make the final determination. Since the boy spoke Hausa and the psychologist did not, he was asked to draw a picture of his family. This is a fairly usual procedure in nonverbal testing from which a psychologist will make a number of assumptions.

Mohammed was given a large piece of paper and a crayon and he began to draw. First a large stick figure, then four small figures. Then he counted. One...on his fingers, with his yes turned upwards, he subvocalized, one, two...and drew some five small stick beings. Again the same procedure, first the count and then some five more... a third time, count and draw. The psychologist, exasperated after the first dozen small figures turned to the boy and insisted: "I said your family -- not your tribe."

Mohammed, however, very serious at his task, very task-oriented, said, I am, I am -- I'm almost finished -- I only have one more mother to do!"

To repeat Tolstoy, all happy families resemble one another but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Maybe that's why we teachers of children and teachers of teachers must really recognize cultural pluralism for what it contributes to our lives as well as to the lives of "our" children.